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ABSTRACT

Many college mission statements convey the importance of citizenship education to prepare future leaders. However, values education often remains, at best, peripheral to the community college curriculum. This digest provides an examination of the classical and current approaches to community college values education. According to the digest, classical approaches to values education encompass techniques from the Values Clarification Approach to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The digest also cites Bok, who suggests that instructors should take greater care to direct classroom discussion that will engage students in confronting and resolving ethical dilemmas. Current examples include models of values education delivered by three community colleges in different parts of the country. For example, in Broome Community College (NY), new requirements for the associate's degree include courses in Communicating Effectively, Acting Civically, Thinking Globally and Cross-Culturally, Thinking Critically, and Reasoning Ethically. At St. Vincent's College (CT), a task force was convened to assure that competency-based learning experiences related to ethical and critical thinking and decision making were provided across the curriculum. (AF)

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Digest

April, 2000

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Values Education in the Two-Year Colleges

By Jenny Lee

Most of today's colleges convey goals of citizenship education and the preparation of future leaders as prominent aims, but such ideals are often left unsupported in the curriculum and in the classroom. Postsecondary institutions continue to offer some courses in morals and ethics, although often in the form of electives from an exhaustive list of unrelated courses labeled "humanities" or "humanistic inquiry". Such elective courses tend to enroll only a small fraction of students, particularly at community colleges. Moreover, even among the limited ethics courses available, it has been argued that many such courses fail to teach values as effectively as they tend to teach facts, concepts, and theories (Thomas, 1993).

According to the National Council of Instructional Administrators (1992), successful students are defined as follows: "Successful students are successful learners who identify, commit to, and attain their educational goals. They acquire and demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and attitudes and self-direction needed to perform *ethically* and productively in society, to adapt to change, to appreciate diversity, and to make a reasoned commitment on issues of importance" (p. 1). This position, which has been adopted by the American Association of Community Colleges, clearly demonstrates the continuing importance of ethics and moral development in contemporary higher education. Based upon both theoretical approaches and contemporary examples, this Digest offers possible approaches and examples of morals and values education in both the classroom and the curriculum.

Does Values Education belong in the Community College?

In practice, values education is often peripheral to the core of the college curriculum and instruction in values is often perceived as inappropriate for community colleges. One challenge is how to acknowledge multiple values, particularly given the diverse composition of today's community college students. The precarious nature of values education in the curriculum is also due to a concern that any possible indoctrination of values by a faculty member would be an invasion of privacy and a retreat to *in loco parentis*. However, it can also be argued that all higher education institutions ought to prepare future leaders and citizens not only by testing concepts and theories, but also by developing critical thinking skills through making moral judgements. That is, colleges should consider how to develop the necessary ethical reasoning that is required of all leaders and all professions. This can be accomplished by examining the classic approaches that integrate values and moral thinking into the classroom.

Classic Approaches to Values Education in the Community College Classroom

Smith and Martin (1979) offer three possible conceptual frameworks for incorporating values education. First, the Values Clarification Approach (Raths et. al., 1966) is widely practiced in public schools. According to this approach, students clarify their values without using a standard measure. The objective is to encourage students to consider their values and to reflect upon them. Here the focus is on the process of valuing, more than the actual content. The three basic dimensions are described as prizing one's beliefs and behaviors, choosing one's beliefs and behaviors, and acting on one's beliefs

The Cognitive Development Approach to moral education utilizes Kohlberg's theory of moral development. According to his view, by confronting moral issues, students can develop higher levels of moral thinking. These stages are:
(1) Preconventional Level—student is responsive to rules dictating what is good and bad, but the student interprets these rules according to the consequences or the power of those who enforce the rules.
(2) Conventional Level—the student perceives expectations apart from the consequences. In this level, students are loyal to the group and identify with those involved.
(3) Postconventional Level—the student makes a clear effort to define moral values and principles apart from the persons holding these principles.

The Development Approach utilizes Perry's theory of personality evolution. Like Kohlberg's moral development approach, Perry's theory is also explained in a series of stages. Perry's study showed the wide range of ways that students construe the origin of values and the nature of knowledge.

These three approaches can serve as models for values education in the classroom. In addition, Bok (1982) suggests that instructors take greater responsibility in promoting more rigorous class discussion that will engage students in confronting and resolving ethical dilemmas. Regardless of the discipline, Bok encourages instructors to consider the practical implications of how the course content relates to concrete cases in human affairs and the consequences of one course of action over another.

Current Examples of Values Curriculum

Beyond the classroom, ways to emphasize values in the curriculum require consensual institutional commitment. Community college missions and curricula vary, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to present a theoretical values approach that will encompass all institutions.

However, observing curriculum examples in practice will provide some insight into ways institutions can incorporate values education.

Broome Community College (New York)

This institution established seven minimum requirements for the Associate of Arts degree. These include Communicating Effectively, Acting Civically, Thinking Globally and Cross-Culturally, Thinking Critically, Reasoning Ethically, Understanding and Using Math, Science, and Technology, and Maintaining Good Health and Fitness. The six core courses that teach Reasoning Ethically explore public policy issues relating to justice. Evaluation of student progress in moral reasoning is primarily based on classroom participation. One particular course, Communicating About Ideas and Values, requires students to engage in moral discourse on selected readings.

Community College of Aurora (Colorado)

Instructors at this college developed a program entitled Integrating the Teaching of Ethics in the Community College Curriculum. Eighty-four faculty members participated in a seminar on integrating ethics into the curriculum, which was then implemented into various courses, affecting approximately 1,700 students. Outcomes included

- An increased awareness of ethical issues
- Better interaction among students and instructors
- Faculty and students ability to better clarify their own values, integrate, understand, and apply the practical and theoretical aspects of their discipline
- More principled, moral reasoning

The curricular integration of ethics remains a permanent part of the instructional repertoire.

St. Vincent's College (Connecticut)

As a means to clarify how students of this college were meeting the stated goals of its general education program, a task force developed the following educational outcomes: basic communication skills, basic mathematical skills, basic research skills, critical thinking skills, an appreciation for the humanities and society, knowledge of scientific principles, and ethics and values. In measuring development in ethics and values, students were expected to be able to:

- Examine, articulate and apply own ethical views
- Understand and apply core concepts
- Analyze and reflect on the ethical dimensions of legal, social, and scientific issues
- Identify personal values and then employ them in ethical decision-making

Through surveys, syllabi review, and other methods, the task force ascertained that competency-based learning experiences are being provided across the curriculum.

Conclusion

Values education is an important, yet sometimes neglected subject area in today's classrooms and curriculum. Despite explicit statements demonstrating community colleges' positions on values development among students, the precarious nature of the topic makes values education difficult to implement. However, as this Digest seeks to demonstrate, values education *can* be adequately addressed in both the classroom and college curriculum. Particularly with an increasingly diverse composition of students and faculty, recognizing, developing, and communicating personal values, ethics, and morals cannot be ignored. In sum, understanding both classic and contemporary approaches are essential in creating a community that both acknowledges and appreciates diverse values and beliefs.

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